

Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

Submission Cover Sheet

Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

Contact Details

Name of respondent:	[REDACTED]
Name of organisation:	Central Goldfields Shire Council
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Date:	28 February 2014

Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? Yes No

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.



PLEASE QUOTE REFERENCE
ENQUIRIES

Central Goldfields Shire – Victoria Submission to the Mobile Coverage Program February 28, 2014

Central Goldfields Shire is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Mobile Coverage Program for \$100million to improve mobile and telecommunications infrastructure and its improved access to Regional and Rural Australia.

Council supports both components of the program: **\$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project**: to improve mobile coverage along major transport routes, in small communities and in areas that are prone to experiencing natural disasters along with **\$20 million Mobile Black Spots Project**: to improve mobile coverage in locations with unique coverage problems, such as areas with high demand for services during seasonal holiday periods; we believe that our Shire falls into both of the areas.

Summary of Central Goldfields Shire:

Located at the geographical centre of Victoria, Central Goldfields Shire covers 1,532 square kilometers and has an estimated residential population of just over 12,500 people.

Maryborough is the shire's major business centre with a population of around 7,500. Maryborough has gained recognition in recent years as having some of the finest sporting facilities in regional Victoria, together with significant historical buildings dating back to the gold mining era of the 1850s.

Other towns in the shire include Bealiba, Carisbrook, Dunolly, Majorca, Talbot, Bowenvale-Timor and the rural districts surrounding these centres. All are famous for their heritage architecture and significant agricultural industries.

Central Goldfields Shire strives to provide the community with choice. Delivering quality of life to residents is the highest priority.

Quality of life depends on a combination of social, environmental, economic and cultural attributes. Every day, Council works to deliver improvements on these attributes, to ensure that each community member has a quality lifestyle that is rich with choice. Unfortunately, due to lack of telecommunication infrastructure both fixed and mobile the vision of our Shire is impacted in reaching its full potential.

The State Government's commitment to the shire has seen recent investments in the areas of health, education, and law and order, together with assistance to economic development activities initiated by Council. The Shire is located within one hour's drive from main provincial centres of Ballarat and Bendigo and just two hours from Melbourne but unfortunately it does not have complete mobile coverage on main roads, highways or rail links with a significant number of blackspots along these main transport routes.

The shire is currently experiencing growth with key infrastructure projects and residential developments reaching fruition however, Telecommunications plays a key role in this growth and is hindering the Shire from enabling further growth to occur.

What can we do?

Central Goldfields Shire appreciates that communities need to be proactive in making improvements regarding infrastructure which will strive to assist the attainment of the goals we set ourselves even when elements are out of Councils' direct area of responsibility. Regular dialogue occurs with two of the three major mobile providers Telstra Corporation and Optus (who are the larger providers in the Shire) however these discussions only occur with anecdotal evidence and information from ratepayers. Our Shire population is very small in comparison to our neighbouring larger regional centres such as Bendigo, Ballarat and beyond with metropolitan Melbourne. Although we aim to service ratepayers as a first priority, it is the transient population that travels through our Shire daily (including for example workers, contractors, visitors, travellers and tourists) who also receive far less than satisfactory mobile coverage due to blackspots and lack of infrastructure.

The Shire has taken a lead partnership role from within the group of Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Loddon Mallee Region. This partnership with iLoddon Mallee, Regional Development Australia/Regional Development Victoria - Loddon Mallee to seek funding for Independent testing to be carried out for the 10 Local Government Areas within the Region. This assessment will enable the Shire to have the analytical information which has been lacking about the true performance of mobile connectivity. As most criticism/complaints that are brought to the attention of Councils, Governments and Telecommunications providers the vast majority is anecdotal. Without the ability to test more rigorously local government is left to rely solely on a priorities process with the Telco's of which critical mass and return on investment become the guiding priorities. So smaller rural Shires are left struggling to be heard in this commercial environment.

It is due to these elements that Central Goldfields Shire has strongly been advocating that a collaborative approach be taken to assess independently the areas of concern for the region and then ultimately priorities can be taken and assist in the plan to improve the mobile performance in our Shire and the wider region.

See attachment 1 (complaints from ratepayers)

Natural Disasters and High Demand:

Reliable telecommunications in situations of natural disasters are difficult and as much as it is imperative there is an expectation of risk. Council understands in a natural disaster infrastructure may well be lost due to a number of circumstances. Notwithstanding the risk with mobile communications that capacity can shut a network down also however, where there is a build up or time to prepare for such a situation then cells on wheels (COWs) can be implemented. This infrastructure is portable and can be deployed to increase capacity immediately. This scenario is also where funding to rural communities should be given in these circumstances that either Government have the ability to deploy COWs or insist that Telcos have an obligation to have these available. Large events such as sporting activities Telco's will monitor traffic and ensure levels of capacity through such mechanisms this should also be available in rural communities in disaster/emergency situations. This does not always occur, so therefore consideration through the funding program may well be an immediate opportunity to understand how further capacity can be enlisted in these situations along with improved coverage in known "high risk" areas of flood and fire.

Dual Role of Technology:

In small rural communities mobile communication takes on an even more important role where it plays the part of not just mobile voice comms but that also of broadband for data transfer. No, this is not new information and happens in large towns and capital cities also but in the majority of cases individuals have the choice in those cities and towns to have either fixed wire broadband connection or mobile wireless data or both; in rural communities there is no choice of ADSL due to the distance from the Exchange and in many cases the broadband is only through wireless mobile broadband. In areas where coverage is patchy this connectivity is extremely poor and residents do have to rely on dial up!

Another issue is where mobile comms is the only source of broadband and the “new age blackspot” is contention of the mobile network where there is capacity being shared and so the performance of the mobile connection for data diminishes to such an extent it renders it useless particularly from 4.00pm onwards when children are returning from school and the network is congested. This is a daily occurrence in rural communities and also in the city where Telcos do not provide enough capacity! Obviously the NBN will improve this situation with dedicated fixed wireless but that is somewhat off and it will still have situations of blackspots where the wireless depth will not service and then satellite is the only option. Unfortunately now satellite under NBN Co has reached its capacity and we are being led to believe new customers are not able to connect.

In Central Goldfields Shire where there has been ADSL and ADSL2+ available these ports are very near capacity and further releasing of this technology is not occurring so ratepayers only have the choice of connecting to mobile wireless where it works. This is becoming more frequent amongst Telcos and resellers that infrastructure is not being extended supposedly due to the NBN being built. This is quite widespread in a number of rural communities and again ratepayers/businesses have no choice but to connect to mobile wireless broadband for their data connection.

Opportunity for Smaller Communities:

With the technical information from mapping, drive testing and other relevant data available to local government; it will be a much more fruitful discussion. Planning that can be had by Councils with either the Federal Government for the proposed mobile program, or with Telcos about performance and gaps in the LGA and with business where joint investment could also occur if possible with Telcos. In countries such as Canada who are much further advanced in the uses and application of technology than Australia they have a number of “smart cities” now with high levels of broadband connectivity which has been driven by local government. Local Government deal directly with Telcos – is this the best model? Not if you are a small rural council such as Central Goldfields who does not have the dollar resource to attract large Telcos. However, the tools to do things differently is what drives connectivity and the will to want to connect communities better via applications used for health, education, business and lifestyle are what will see small rural communities survive and prosper so connectivity is so important to make this happen. The top three questions to real estate agents from prospective buyers is about connectivity. If we are to attract residents to smaller shires and communities they need a good level of broadband connectivity be it wireless or fixed. Central Goldfields Shire is strongly committed to improving the liveability of the Shire and mobile communications is a key piece to ensure this happens

In summary, Central Goldfields is very willing to work with the Federal Government to assist in improving mobile communications connectivity through the opportunity of the funding. The Shire's dependence in achieving its goals is critical and mobile connectivity is imperative for the future growth, prosperity and wellbeing of this community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Johnston', with a large, stylized flourish extending downwards and to the left.

Mark Johnston

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER